

**CLAIMS:**

1. A method of acquiring and playing digital content comprising:  
 acquiring a physical electronic key containing a key code from a key provider;  
 acquiring locked digital content from a content provider, the digital content  
 5 being marked with an unlock code associated with the key code; and  
 entering the locked digital content into a playing device that reads the key  
 code and determines whether the key code is associated with the  
 unlock code, the device being enabled to unlock and play the digital  
 content if the key code is associated with the unlock code.  
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2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of acquiring the physical electronic  
 key includes providing the key provider with user identification information for use  
 by the key provider in establishing a user account, the user account including the user  
 identification information and the key code.  
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3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of acquiring the locked digital content  
 includes providing the content provider with the key code for use by the content  
 provider in validating the key code prior to providing the locked digital content.
- 20 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the locked digital content is locked by  
 encryption and unlocked by decryption.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of acquiring the physical electronic  
 key includes accessing a first web site of the key provider and requesting the physical  
 25 electronic key via the first web site, and wherein the step of acquiring the locked  
 digital content includes accessing a second web site of the content provider and  
 requesting the digital content via the second web site.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the physical electronic key is acquired at no  
 30 charge, and wherein the digital content is purchased.
7. A method of managing digital rights comprising:

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electronic key and determines that the key code is associated with the unlock code.

14. The method of claim 13, further including establishing a user account  
5 including user identification information and the key code for the requesting user prior to the step of providing the physical electronic key.

15. The method of claim 13, further including obtaining and validating the key  
code for the requesting user prior to the step of applying the unlock code to the locked  
10 digital content.

16. The method of claim 3, wherein the physical electronic key and the playing  
device include respective wireless transceivers for communicating the key code from  
the key to the playing device.  
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17. A digital rights management system, comprising:  
a physical electronic key containing a key code and provided to a requesting  
user;  
means for providing locked digital content to the requesting user, the digital  
content being marked with an unlock code associated with the key  
code; and  
20 a playing device for receiving the locked digital content, receiving the key  
code, and determining whether the key code is associated with the  
unlock code, the playing device being enabled to unlock and play the  
digital content if the key code is associated with the unlock code.  
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18. The system of claim 17, wherein the physical electronic key and the playing  
device include means for communicating the key code to the playing device.

30 19. The system of claim 17, wherein the means for providing the locked digital  
content to the requesting user includes a web site on the Internet.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the means for providing the locked digital content secures validation of the key code prior to providing the locked digital content.

5 21. The system of claim 17, further including means for providing the physical electronic key, and establishing a user account including user identification information and the key code for the requesting user prior to providing the key.

10 22. The system of claim 21, wherein the means for providing the physical electronic key includes a web site on the Internet.

15 23. A digital rights management system, comprising:  
a physical electronic key containing a key code;  
locked digital content marked with an unlock code associated with the key  
code; and  
a playing device for receiving the locked digital content, receiving the key  
code, and determining whether the key code is associated with the  
unlock code, the playing device being enabled to unlock and play the  
digital content if the key code is associated with the unlock code.

20 24. The system of claim 23, wherein the digital content is locked by encryption and unlocked by decryption.

25 25. The system of claim 23, wherein the physical electronic key and the playing device include means for communicating the key code to the playing device.